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UNCLAS ALGIERS 001242

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MORE JOURNALISTS SENTENCED TO PRISON IN NEW "BLACK TUESDAY"

REF: ALGIERS 1149

1. Three journalists were sentenced June 14 for defamation in separate cases before the local Algiers tribunal. The cartoonist Ali Dilem of Liberte newspaper was sentenced to six months in prison and a DA 250,000 (\$3,400) fine, while the journalist Kamel Amarni and the publication director Fouad Boughanem of Le Soir d'Algerie were sentenced to six and two months, respectively. Each was also fined DA 250,000. This is Boughanem's and Amarni's second sentencing (ref A) since receiving two-month sentences and DA 250,000 fines in May, which they are appealing. These criminal trials for defamation took place May 31 and culminated in yesterday's sentencing.

2. Amarni and Boughanem from Le Soir d'Algerie were sentenced for Amarni's 2003 article entitled "The Coup," in which the reporter wrote that then-presidential candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika "was using the state's means for electoral purposes."

3. Dilem was sentenced for drawing a cartoon in which he criticized army generals. The cartoon alluded to a telethon organized after the 2001 Bab El-Oued floods in Algiers. One man in the cartoon says, "It seems that even generals have donated to the telethon." The other replies, "Those are not called donations; they're restitutions!" The cartoon implies that generals were returning money to the state that had been unlawfully taken. (Note: The former publication director of Liberte, Abrous Toudert, was acquitted of similar charges.)

4. There are currently two Algerian journalists in prison and nine sentenced to prison terms while awaiting appeal, including the earlier appeals of Boughanem and Amarni. These journalists have all been convicted for defamation under the penal code, in these cases for defamation against government officials.

ERDMAN